

Department of Public Health
and Human Services

Section:
INTRODUCTION

FOOD STAMP PROGRAM

Subject:
Introduction

Supersedes: FMFS Introduction (09/01/98)

**► FOOD STAMP
PURPOSE &
SCOPE**

The Food Stamp Program was established to aid in ending hunger and improve nutrition and health. Food stamp benefits assist low-income households in purchasing the food they need for a nutritionally adequate diet and provides crucial support to needy households.

Congress passed the Food Stamp Act of 1977 in order to provide eligible households an opportunity to obtain a more nutritious diet by supplementing their food budget.

- The Food Stamp Program enables eligible households to purchase food with the use of Food Stamp benefits issued each month in their Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) account. The amount of the allotment a household receives is determined by income and the household size.
- Participating households may purchase food with their Montana Access (EBT) card at retail food stores authorized to accept them by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Food and Nutrition Service (FNS). Only eligible foods or food products intended for home consumption and seeds and plants for a home garden may be purchased with food stamp benefits. Alcoholic beverages, household products, cigarettes, hot foods ready to eat, and pet food cannot be purchased with food stamp benefits. A limited number of participants who meet specific eligibility and residence criteria may use their food stamp benefits to buy prepared meals e.g. authorized meal delivery service, authorized communal dining facility for elderly or SSI households, etc.

**ADMINISTRATION
RESPONSIBILITIES**

The Food Stamp Program is administered by joint cooperation between Federal, State, and County government. The state of Montana is responsible for the certification of applicants and issuance of benefits. This is accomplished cooperatively through the Offices of Public Assistance providing the daily client contact under the rules disseminated by the State. The Federal government provides guidelines for State operations and is responsible for authorization and supervision of participating retailers, institutions and meal delivery services.

The Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) must fulfill the following requirements and responsibilities in the operation of the Food Stamp Program:

1. Certify applicant households.

2. Issue, control and account for food stamp benefits.
3. Develop, conduct and evaluate training.
4. Develop and maintain complaint procedures.
5. Conduct performance-reporting reviews.
6. Submit accurate and timely financial and program reports as required by USDA, FNS.

► OPA STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

The policies and procedures throughout this manual are intended to be a guide for food stamp certification and are written within the limits imposed by the Food Stamp Act and Regulations. The policies contained in this manual are intended to be sufficiently flexible to allow OPA Case Managers to exercise reasonable judgment in executing their responsibilities.

In this regard, the concept of the 'prudent' worker can be helpful. The term refers to the reasonableness of the judgments made by an individual worker in a given situation. In a court case, a person charged with negligence will try to show that his actions were the actions that any reasonable or 'prudent' person would take in the same circumstances.

- In making a certification decision, the OPA Case Manager should be conscientious about making a decision that is reasonable, based on his/her knowledge of and experience with the Food Stamp Program.
- **Example:** It is the OPA Case Manager's responsibility to determine, using reasonable judgment, if a given number of individuals who apply for food stamps as a single household do, in fact, fit the regulatory concept of a household.
- If the OPA Case Manager encounters a problem in a specific case that is felt to be outside the ordinary policy and procedure, the problem should be resolved through administrative channels.
- If existing policy guidelines generally covers the problem, the OPA Case Manager should make a judgment that can be defined as reasonable and prudent.

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